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Congress of the United States
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The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

As a longstanding supporter of comprehensive air safety standards, I share your strong concerns over the level of staffing within air traffic control towers at our nation's airports in the wake of a critical lapse in coverage at Reagan National Airport. I applaud your call for increased staffing at the tower at DCA and I urge you to ensure that towers at airports across the country are staffed adequately to certifiably prevent similar instances from occurring in the future.

In light of the landmark air safety reforms that became law just last year, we cannot let other parts of our aviation safety infrastructure fall behind. We cannot let those advances in safety be undermined by a lack of adequate staffing in towers. I support an expedient review and hope and expect that it will conclude what common sense already concludes – that at least 2 controllers are needed per tower, for reasons like the one today where someone falls asleep or in the case of a medical emergency, security breach, or any other unforeseen circumstances.

As you know, staffing shortages among air traffic controllers have been well-documented for quite some time, as much as 27% below the scientifically-based staffing standards jointly authorized by the FAA and the National Air Traffic Control Association. This is particularly disturbing at a time when more people are flying the airways and, particularly in my community in Western New York, where we are still reeling from the tragedy of Flight 3407, there is an attenuated concern to whether our skies are indeed safe.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress